



VOL. 1 NO. 11 — DECEMBER, 1977

PRICE: \$1.00/\$8.00 PER YEAR

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BIBLICAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

9301 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD

BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA 90210

All rights reserved.

MEL WACKS, Editor DR. BARUCH KANAEL, DR. ROBERT WEBBER, Contributing Editors.

Coin of the Month**BRONZE PRUTAH OF THE FIRST REVOLT**

Virtually immediately after the outset of the Judaean Revolt against the Romans (66 AD), Jewish Silver Shekels and Half Shekels were minted from the silver in the Temple Treasury. This was an important show of autonomy, for up to that time the Jewish nation was not permitted to issue silver coins . . . just small bronzes. It was not until the second year of the revolt that any bronze coins were produced, and then they were evidently made in large quantities. The inscription . . . in ancient Hebrew . . . proclaimed "The Deliverance of Zion," the first use of this term in numismatics. This month we will discuss the obverse design of an amphora, leaving the "Zion" inscription and reverse vine-leaf symbol for our next issue.



Gratus



First Revolt



The First Revolt prutah bears a remarkable resemblance to the same denomination issued just 50 years earlier by the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus (17/18 AD). Whether this was intentional we do not know.



Year 2



Year 3

The vessel shown is a narrow-necked amphora with fluted body and two curved handles. The same vessel, but with a conical lid from which nine fringes or pellets are suspended, appears on the bronze coins of the third year of the revolt. Ya'akov Meshorer indicated in a lecture

that he thought the pointed top was added just to fill in the space formed with the different inscription. However, the Mishnah indicates that the vessel used in the Temple ceremony of the wine libation had to be covered. The cover in combination with the grape vine depicted on the reverse are strong evidence for a wine vessel.

Experts (Romanoff, Kadman, et al) agree that the prutah vessel is not a large storage jar, but was a utensil actually used in the Temple ritual, such as "And thou shalt make the dishes thereof, and spoons thereof, and covers thereof, and bowls thereof . . . of pure gold" (Exodus 25:29). Much later, Josephus writes of the gold and silver vessels presented to the Temple by Ptolemy Philadelphus and those sent by Augustus and Livia. These vessels were used for three kinds of liquids - water and wine for libation, and the oil used for lighting the famous Temple menorah.



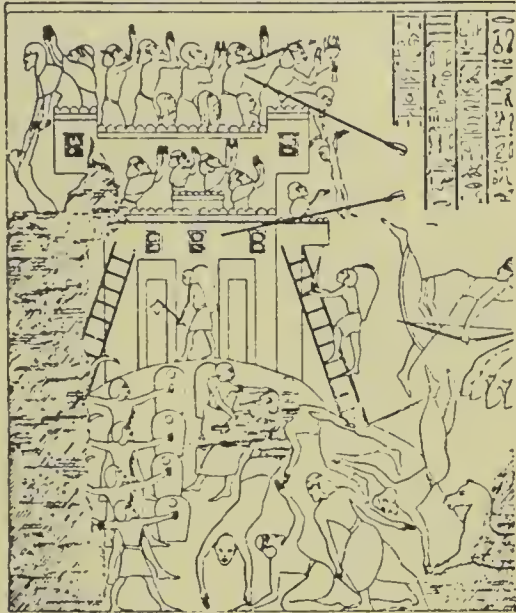
A significant piece of evidence for assigning the prutah vessel to an oil container is the appearance of a strikingly similar container on an oil lamp dating to the first centuries of this era, in the collection of The Jewish Museum (New York). Romanoff (Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins) writes, "The building on the lamp suggests the Temple of Jerusalem. The amphora on the clay lamp appearing in the center of the Temple no doubt represents the vessel of oil which nourishes the flames in the lamp." Therefore, there is the possibility that this amphora, like the 7-branched palm tree coin-symbol, meant to be symbolic of the holy Temple Menorah, which itself was prohibited to be portrayed.

Our slide was produced by stalwart BNS member Dr. Robert Webber. The actual coin can be compared to the 100 year old illustration from Madden's "Coins of the Jews."

ASHKELON

By Mel Wacks NLG

Ashkelon (or Ascalon) is an ancient maritime city in the southern coastal plain of ancient Palestine (now modern Israel), located 12 miles north of Gaza. The etymology of the name Ashkelon is probably Western Semitic and may be derived from the root shkl ("to weigh"), indicating a commercial or financial center. Another possible source for its name lies in Askalos, who according to Lydian legend was the son of Hymenaios, who was sent on an expedition to Syria, where he founded Ashkelon.



The conquest of Ashkelon by troops of Ramses II, as depicted in a bas-relief at Karnak, on the Nile, dating from c. 1234-1201 B.C.E. The relief, of which this is a drawing, shows the fortress, situated on a hill, under assault by Egyptian soldiers, with most of the defenders in the act of surrender.

Ashkelon was taken from the Egyptians by the Philistines in the middle of the 12th Century BC. Not long after, when "Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the Lord said unto him, thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. This is the land that yet remaineth: all the borders of the Philistines . . . the Bazathites, and the Ashdothites, the **Eshkalonites** . . ." (Joshua 13:1-3). It was left to the tribe of Judah, which "took Gaza with the coast thereof and Askalon with the coast thereof" (Judges 1:18). However, Ashkelon remained one of the five chief Philistine city-states.

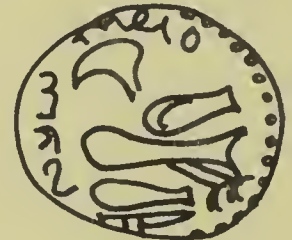
Another Biblical reference is when Samson "went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil" (Judges 14:19). And again in the Book of Samuel: "Publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph" (II Samuel 1:20). The Philistine city was finally subdued and destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar: "Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley" (Jeremiah 47:5).

Ashkelon was thereupon under the control of Tyre in the Persian period, the Ptolemies of Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great, and it then became a center of Greek culture under the Seleucids of Syria. Independence was finally regained in 104 BC. With forays of the Hasmoneans successfully fought off, Ashkelon maintained its identity as a "free and allied city" through the Roman period. Ashkelon was the birthplace of Herod the Great, but while he made architectural contributions to the city, it never became part of his Judean domain.

During the First Revolt of Judaea against Rome (66-70 AD), the Ashkelonites battled with and defeated the Jews; but soon after Jews were flourishing in the Philistine city as the remains of a synagogue from the period of the Mishnah and Talmud indicates. In the early years of Byzantine rule, Ashkelon was the seat of a school of Hellenistic philosophy and was strongly opposed to Christianity. The population, rather, adhered to the worship of its fish-goddess Derceto (Atargatis), whose image consisted of the head and trunk of a woman and the tail of a fish. This Syrian goddess, the myth relates, offended Aphrodite, who in consequence inspired her with love for a youth, to whom she bore a daughter. Ashamed of her frailty, Derceto killed the youth, exposed her child in a desert, and threw herself into a lake near Ashkelon. Derceto's daughter was fed by doves, and she herself was changed into a fish. In consequence of this legend, the dove is one of the most common devices found on the coins of Ashkelon for over 600 years, from before 104 BC to the Arab period c. 7th Century AD.



Silver diobol (?)
before 104 BC
(enlarged).



Arab bronze
c. 7th century AD
(enlarged).

Now let us examine some of the more interesting coins of historic Ashkelon, in the words of George Francis Hill from his *Catalog of the Greek Coins of Palestine* in the British Museum Collection, published in 1914:



Silver tetradrachm of Cleopatra VII, struck at Ashkelon in 30 BC.

The silver tetradrachms with Ptolemaic types are (probably) dated by an era beginning in 84 BC, commemorating the defeat of Alexander Jannaeus at Addida by Aretas III in that year. This chronology brings all the group of (Ptolemaic) coins within the reign of Cleopatra. Her own portrait does not occur on the Egyptian silver coins until 46 BC.



Bronze coin of Ashkelon with prow of an oared galley (enlarged). Abbreviated name of city above, and date below corresponding to 47 BC.



Unknown
portrait
on small
bronze,
47 BC
(enlarged).

The classification of the remainder of the undated coins of Ascaion, before or at the beginning of the Imperial period, presents great difficulty. Some of the heads which are represented seem to the portraits of other people than (Roman Emperor) Augustus . . . for instance Gaius Caesar which may have been struck about 5 BC. A few years later than this Gaius went to Syria from Egypt, and although he avoided Judaea he may well have been honored by the anti-Semite Ascaionians even though he did not land at their city. (Other designs) suggest a connection with Herod the Great. The types of cornucopiae and caduceus are, however, so colorless that little stress can be laid on their occurrence at Ascaion as well as on Herod's coins. In any case they cannot have been struck at Herod's orders, but only out of compliment to him.

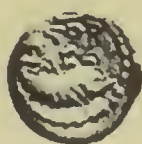


Undated
bronze of
Ashkelon



Bronze of
Herod the
Great.

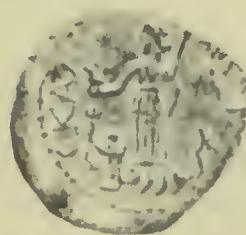
The coinage with heads of Emperors is fairly continuous from Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD) to Maximinus (235-238 AD). Owing to the custom which prevailed at this mint, as at Gaza, of omitting the personal names of all early Emperors, combined with the execrable work of the engraver, the arrangement (of the coins) until the time of Antoninus Pius, depend entirely on the inscribed dates, themselves too often obscure. From A.D. 72/3 to 143/4 there is a quasi-autonomous coinage, plentiful but insignificant.



Quasi-autonomous coin, with city goddess and galley.

The City-goddess, who appears constantly on the coins from Augustus to Geta stands upon a prow, holds standard and aphlaston, and is regularly accompanied by a dove and an altar of somewhat peculiar form, with three projections at the top which have caused it to be described as a trident. The standard has sometimes merely a cross-bar, but often this bar is attached by stays to the top, giving the head a triangular shape. The dove also appears as the attribute of a goddess who is represented on coins from the time of Antoninus Pius

onwards. She wears on her head not a turreted crown, but a crescent. She stands not on a prow, but on a Triton, who holds aloft a cornucopiae; she holds not a standard, but a sceptre, and the dove is in her hand, not in the field of the coin.



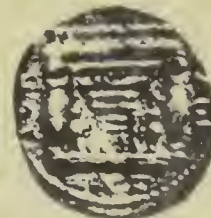
Derketo stands
on Triton on
coin of
Macrianus
(260-261 AD).
Photo courtesy
of Steven Blau.

There can be little doubt that the former goddess is Astarte as City-goddess; the evidence of the numerous other representations of the marine Astarte in Phoenician cities is conclusive. In the other goddess I would also see Astarte, in her more special local form, with the name of Atargatis (Derketo). We know that Derketo was worshipped at Ascalon in a semipiscine form, but it does not follow that there was not also a human representation of her, since in other cities, as in Hieropolis, this fish-form did not prevail. The sea-monster on which the goddess stands would express her marine nature. The dove was also sacred to her.



Triton ("Sea-
monster"), from
a Roman lamp

Under Antoninus Pius first appears the remarkable building which is most clearly represented on the coin of Sept. Severus. It appears to consist of a series of four doorways, one within (i.e. really beyond) the other. The Egyptian element in the architecture is strong, being perceptible not merely in the uraei which decorate two, if not three, of the architraves, but in the shapes of the columns flanking two of the entrances. With the club-shaped columns are to be compared those of the temple of Isis on Alexandrian coins. The type probably represents the approach to some sanctuary through a series of doorways.



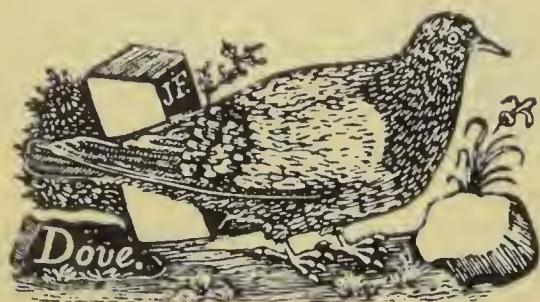
Under Caracalla, Ascalon was one of the mints for the silver or billion issues of the Syrian province. The solitary specimen hitherto published has on the reverse the bust of Isis with a crown, sceptre, and flail, above three lions' heads. It was this coin which gave the key for the distribution among various mints of the coins which had been classed together under Antioch.



Scripture Animals

DOVE

by Rev. Johathan Fisher (1833)



This beautiful and harmless bird is frequently mentioned in the Bible. Its name in Hebrew, is Yonâh; it comes from a word signifying to *oppress*; the dove being much oppressed, and often pursued and seized by birds of prey. We first meet with the name in Gen. 8:8. Speaking of Noah, it is said, He sent forth a dove from him to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground.



Earliest numismatic depiction of Noah's Ark, with dove above, on coin of Apamea, c. 3rd century AD.

The name in Greek, is Peristera. By the name Yonâh, we are probably to understand the tame pigeon, often called the dove. This bird in its wild, and more natural state is called the Stock-dove; it is of a bluish ash color, the breast dashed with a fine changeable green and purple; the sides of its neck with shining copper color; its wings are marked with two black bars, the back is white, and the tail barred near the end with black. As its name imports, it is the origin of all the beautiful variety of the tame pigeon. The dove in its domesticated state is gentle, timid, harmless, peaceable, loving to its mate, and neat in its food. It is the emblem of simplicity, love, and innocence. Its plumage is very various; some are of a snowy whiteness. Its form is elegant, its cooing plaintive and affectionate. Its food is principally grain of various kinds. It lays two eggs at a time, and breeds almost every month in the year, by means of which it multiplies very fast, especially, if well fed. In Persia and Egypt they constitute a good measure of the riches of the husbandman. They feed their young from their crops, the young ones thrusting their bills into their mouths, and taking thence their food.

The male and female take turns in sitting on their eggs. They are used in some countries to carry letters, which are fastened under their wings. Their sight is keen, their eyes are beautiful, their hearing quick, and they are quick in their motions, and swift in their flight.

They are reckoned in the ceremonial law among the clean birds, and were, with the Turtle-dove, offered in sacrifice by divine direction. As the Son of God, on account of his innocence and gentleness, as well as for his being offered in sacrifice for our sins, is called in scripture a Lamb; so, to give us an idea of purity, mildness, and innocence, the Spirit of God in descending upon the Saviour at the time of his baptism, assumed the form of a Dove.



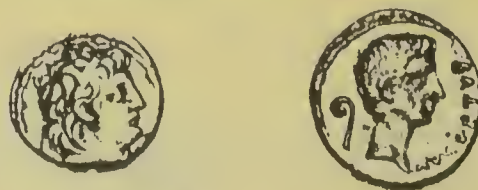
Double Show-Thaler, Hamburg, 1539.

PARABLE OF THE "LOST COIN"

by Charles Tuckwood, BNS
Author of "Ancient Coins"
Associated with Christianity"

The drachma is a tiny coin of the denarius type which weighs an eighth of an ounce. It calls to memory the parable of the "lost coin": "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost" (Luke 15:8-9).

The woman, it is explained, searches diligently indeed because the coin means more to her than mere money. According to an ancient custom in some sections of the Orient, the husband presented to his bride a headpiece hung with ten such silver pieces, an ornament with much the meaning of today's wedding ring. A wife found guilty of infidelity submitted to removal of one of the coins by the judges before whom she was tried.



The drachma was actually a Greek denomination, and, thus, it was perhaps the common Roman denarius that was originally meant to be the "lost piece of silver." (Ed.) Illustrated are a silver drachma of the Syrian King Antiochus VII (138-129 BC) on the left, and a denarius of Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD) on the right.